Press Release

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REINVIGORATED INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IS REQUIRED TO MEET MAJOR NEW CHALLENGES,

according to incoming Secretary-General of WMO, Michel Jarraud

Geneva, 13 January 2004 – New scientific and technological developments and growing social and economic demands call for stronger cooperation among many disciplines within and among countries in order to seize the full benefits of weather, climate and water forecasts and warnings, Mr Michel Jarraud stated in his first public address as Secretary-General (since 1 January 2004) of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

Mr Jarraud was addressing the 84th Annual Meeting of the American Meteorological Society, which is being held in Seattle (USA), from 11 to 15 January 2004.

The Secretary-General of WMO highlighted some major challenges for the meteorological and hydrological community. First and foremost is the improved protection of life and property. This should be achieved through a reduction of the adverse human social and economic impacts of natural disasters and of extreme weather and climate events, as well as through increased awareness and preparedness of people and societies to face such events.

WMO's new major Programme on Natural Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, established by the World Meteorological Congress in May 2003, will encourage the integration of more accurate, timely and useful early warnings about impending hydrological, weather and climate hazards into an overall disaster management framework from preparedness to rescue and rehabilitation. It should also contribute to the reduction of losses through risk and vulnerability assessments. Most importantly, it should help improve national capacities in prediction and warnings, especially in developing countries, in order to shift the emphasis from post-disaster relief to pre-disaster preparedness.

Another challenge is to ensure the proper application of meteorological, hydrological and related information and forecasts in the planning and management of agricultural production, water resources management and, in many economic sectors, greater use of favourable meteorological and hydrological conditions in order to contribute to sustainable economic development and poverty reduction. This will help enhance the quality of life, for instance through adequate and sustained food availability, improved assessment and management of water resources, better air quality and reduced health problems.

Equally important is the provision through WMO of weather, climate and hydrological information for the protection of the environment. The challenge is to provide reliable, timely and more useful advice to decision-makers with regard to policies and courses of action to be taken, on national,

regional and international scales, to prevent adverse climate modification and damage to the natural environment. In this respect, WMO will actively contribute to the development of a more integrated approach to global observing based on its surface - and space-based networks.

WMO will become more involved in environmental matters. “WMO will make additional contributions in areas such as stratospheric ozone depletion, climate change, sea-level rise, atmospheric and water pollution, floods, droughts, desertification and loss of biodiversity, as well as - most importantly - in mitigating the harmful effects of high- impact weather and climate events”, Mr Jarraud stated. “To meet these challenges, there is a growing realization that it will be more effective and efficient to move to complement the current scientific and technical programme approach with a cross-disciplinary, integrated approach in order to resolve issues which are not only of a geophysical nature but also have socio-economic and political implications.”

Global weather and climate patterns are interdependent and no one nation can be entirely self-sufficient in the provision of all of its meteorological, hydrological and related environmental services, Mr Jarraud stressed. That concept is the basis of all WMO programmes. The international coordination of high-standard observational networks and the free sharing of data and products are fundamental principles of WMO.

A major challenge for WMO is to redress the trend of a growing gap between developed and developing countries in the ability to provide user-oriented meteorological and hydrological services, which have become more and more dependent on highly advanced technologies. Capacity building, education, training and increased regional cooperation should aim at enhancing the capability of the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services in developing countries to respond more effectively to the essential needs of their population.

The World Meteorological Organization is the United Nations System’s authoritative voice on Weather, Climate and Water

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